



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 17 – 23 May 2010



19 May 1908 Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge flew an airplane called the *White Wing*, designed by F. W. “Casey” Baldwin, thus becoming the **first Army officer to solo** in an airplane. It was Dr. Alexander Graham Bell's second Aerial Experiment Association plane, and it had hinged ailerons controlled by wires attached to the pilot's harness. When the plane's wings tipped one way, the pilot leaned the other way, pulling the flaps, and leveling the plane.



19 May 1918 **Raoul G. Lufbery**, who earned 17 aerial victories in World War I, lost his life in combat.

Born in France, Lufbery (left) became an American citizen, graduated from Nieuport school in France and was assigned to the Escadrille Americaine on May 24, 1916. Part of Lufbery's success could be attributed to his skill as a mechanic. He hand-loaded his own machine gun rounds into their drums to check for any slight imperfections that might cause his gun to jam. After transferring to the American Expeditionary Forces, he passed much of his knowledge of aerial warfare to fledgling American fighter pilots such as Eddie Rickenbacker.

19 May 1919 MSgt. Ralph W. Botttriell became the first member of the Army to jump from an airplane with a backpack-type **parachute**. MSgt Botttriell (right) designed, developed and tested the first free-fall parachute. He later received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his life-saving work.



Courtesy of the Airmen Memorial Museum



21 May 1927 **Medal of Honor**. Charles Lindbergh (left), a 25-year-old Captain in the Missouri National Guard's 110th Observation Squadron, made the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic.

Lindbergh was pursuing the \$25,000 *Orteig Prize* offered to the pilot of the first successful nonstop flight between New York and Paris. His financing included \$2,000 of his own savings. Six well-known aviators had already died attempting to win the prize when Lindbergh took off.

Lindbergh set a 3,609-mile record for straight-line distance in his 33-hour 39-minute flight. He faced many challenges, such as flying blind through fog for several hours, flying as low as 10 feet above the wave tops to avoid storms and icing, and navigating only by a magnetic compass, his airspeed indicator, the stars (when visible) and dead reckoning. Upon landing in Paris, Lindbergh immediately became an international hero and American celebrity. President Coolidge later presented Lindbergh with the Medal of Honor.

On 21 May 1957 (50th anniversary of Lindbergh's flight), Maj Robinson Risner flew Lindbergh's transatlantic route in an F-100 in 6 hours 40 minutes (compared to 33 1/2 hours).



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20 May - 20 Sep 1951 **Operation STRANGLE**, a massive air interdiction campaign in Korea, was conducted by Fifth Air Force, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), and the Navy's Task Force 77. Similar to an earlier campaign in Italy during World War II and later campaigns against the Ho Chi Minh trail in southeast Asia, Operation Strangle had diminishing success when the pressure on enemy ground forces was reduced. Two principal reasons for the mixed results of this operation were the resiliency and magnitude of enemy logistics efforts, and the lack of effective night and all-weather attack capabilities among the US joint air components.

20 May 1951 Capt James Jabara, flying an F-86 Sabre from the 334th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, became the **world's first jet ace**. On this date, he shot down his fifth and sixth MiG-15s in the Korean War.

Eleven days later, Capt Jabara reported to USAF Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg in his office, and met with Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the leading American Fighter "Ace" of World War I (photo at right).



18 May 1953 Capt Joseph C. McConnell, Jr. (center of photo at left) downed three MiGs in one day and became the first 'triple ace' of the Korean War with 16 victories. On this morning, McConnell and his wingman chased a couple MiGs across the Yalu River. When more MiGs showed up, McConnell quickly scored his 14th and 15th kills. With the staff back at home base monitoring their radio conversation, McConnell's wingman told him that "there must be thirty MiGs." McConnell's reply: "Yeah, and we've got 'em all to ourselves." Despite the bravado, the two American pilots were happy to get back south of

the Yalu. Later that afternoon, McConnell went back up, and scored his third kill of the day, his 16th victory overall. (Source, including photo: http://www.acepilots.com/korea_mcconnell.html.)

21-22 May 1960 **Hawaiian Tsunami**. Tremendous earthquakes in Chile produced tsunami waves that pounded the east coast of the island of Hawaii. Ignoring warnings, many Hilo-area residents had stayed in their homes near the bay, where up to 61 people died and hundreds were left homeless. By the end of May, the 1502nd Air Transport Wing from Hickam AFB airlifted more than 12 tons of emergency equipment and supplies to Hilo. The wing's 50th Air Transport Squadron flew C-124 Globemaster II airplanes for the relief operation, delivering a generator, refrigerator, vans, clothing, and food.

On 23 May, **the Air Force began one of its largest humanitarian airlifts** to relieve the earthquake victims in Chile. Within a month, cargo aircraft had delivered more than 1,000 tons of relief equipment and supplies from bases in the United States, some 4,500 miles away from the stricken region. The airlift was called Operation AMIGOS.



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21 May 1976 **Super Typhoon Pamela** hit Guam with 150 mph winds and 27 inches of rain in a 24-hour period, flooding the island and tearing apart most buildings. Despite preparations, the typhoon killed at least five people, injured 500 and deprived thousands of their homes. Andersen AFB suffered the same level of destruction. Communication with the outside world was lost for 14 hours, and the runways were flooded and buried under debris. Through 9 June, MAC supervised the airlift of 2,652 tons of cargo to Guam in seven C-141s, six C-5s, and one C-130.

17 May 1977 **Eniwetok Cleanup.** A joint US task group was activated on Eniwetok Atoll for a two-year, \$20-million cleanup and decontamination project. Actual cleanup operations began on 15 November. PACAF served as the executive agent for the USAF.

22 May 1990 23rd Air Force was redesignated as **Air Force Special Operations Command**, the USAF component of U.S. Special Operations Command.

23 May 2000 The first production-model **T-6A Texan II** aircraft arrived at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Designed as a dedicated training aircraft with jet-like handling, the T-6A replaces both the Air Force T-37 and the Navy T-34, which had been in service for 38 and 23 years respectively. The T-6A offers better performance and significant improvements in training effectiveness, safety, cockpit accommodations and operational capabilities. (Photo at right)



22 May 2002 The **X-45A unmanned combat air vehicle (UCAV)** flew for the first time at Edwards Air Force Base, California. It was the first unmanned aircraft designed for combat operations in an extremely hostile environment (such as suppression of enemy air defenses). The X-45A is a swept-wing, stealthy design of composite construction, with two internal weapons bays, hardpoints for auxiliary fuel tanks or additional weapons, an internally mounted turbofan engine, and fully retracting landing gear. (Photos below by Jim Ross and NASA.)

